



sixth street community center

REINVENTING COMMUNITY LAND TRUSTS

where we've been- where we're going...

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A community land trust (CLT) is typically defined as a nonprofit organization that holds land on behalf of a community to promote affordable housing and sustainable development. The CLT is a form of shared ownership whereby land is held in perpetuity by the trust while buildings or improvements on the land are owned by individuals or other organizations. Through long-term ground leases to these other owners, the CLT ensures that any developments will remain committed to serving the needs of the broader community. The governing board of the CLT is generally composed of residents on trust land and a majority of non-resident community representatives.

In recent years CLTs have gained in popularity in New York City and around the country as housing has become increasingly unaffordable for the majority. After a long period of quiescence, it is useful to reexamine this model in light of the experiences of earlier efforts beginning in the 1980s. What we have learned is that to endure, the CLT must represent more than a sophisticated development scheme for coop housing and storefront rentals, and not be solely defined by its corporate structure and governance. Rather to promote real change, we must enlarge the meaning of CLTs so that they become a *movement or geo-political foundation* for a radically transformative vision of community that addresses critical issues around labor, food and agriculture, and energy (among other essential needs) along with building and preserving permanently affordable housing for low-income and working class people. To succeed, the CLT must join with other community groups and political formations to broaden its efforts by organizing community residents to oppose privatization of public resources- in particular public housing- and support public and social ownership and the rights of workers.

Along with the 130 units of housing- organized along the lines of a **Mutual Housing Association** within the newly formed **THIS LAND IS OURS CLT-** that Cooper Square Committee and Sixth Street Community Center propose to build in the Lower East Side, we will also develop a **Workers Center**, **Food Coop**, and solar or **Clean Energy Coop**. The Workers Center would build on the history of organizing workers at their job sites and in the communities where they live. It would support workers such as those at Amazon, Starbucks, Traders Joes and the many other business locations where workers are fighting for their rights and for unions. It would also support the long struggle for equity in an economy that underpays or ignores domestic labor.

Sixth Street Community Center is proposing that the Workers Center and Food Coop occupy the ground floor spaces in our CLT development on the East 6th Street parking lot. The Clean Energy Coop would aim to become a district (or even borough) wide parallel alternative energy source to Con Edison by promoting rooftop solar and aggregating energy from these installations on CLT sites and other buildings where owners have agreed to join the coop. This builds on [the work of John Byrne at the Foundation for Renewable Energy and Environment](#). The clean energy coop could be viewed as a "direct action" component to the organizing work already underway to municipalize Con Edison to achieve our ultimate goal of public power.

Finally, Sixth Street Community Center will itself become part of the CLT by socializing the ownership of its land. This will secure the future of the Center and its not-for-profit mission as well as serve as a powerful example of community-building.

A recent article has heralded the "natural partnership" between Cooperatives and CLTs, see [my commentary](#) at the end of that article challenging the fusion of CLTs and so-called limited-equity coops. The evolution of the CLT model over these past 40 years reflects a vital history of the ongoing struggle for community power in the Lower East Side.